

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 1252

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJECT: EANES EMERGES AS LEADING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

REF: LISBON 1055 (DTG 181456Z FEB 76)

SUMMARY: GEN EANES HAS EMERGED IN PAST TWO WEEKS AS LEADING CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT. AS POLITICAL PARTIES AWAIT DECISION ON ARMED FORCES' CANDIDATE, EFFORTS ARE UNDERWAY TO CONVINCE EANES TO RUN. AN EARLY CONSENSUS WOULD AVOID THE DANGER OF COSTA GOMES EMERGING AS A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE. BASED ON PERFORMANCE TO DATE, WE GIVE EANES POSITIVE MARKS FROM USG POLICY STANDPOINT.

1. PRESIDENCY: THE QUESTION OF WHO WILL BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT HAS ASSUMED INCREASING IMPORTANCE IN RECENT WEEKS. THE INSISTENCE OF THE PPD THAT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
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CLOSELY FOLLOW THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OF APRIL 25

HAS FOCUSED GREATER ATTENTION ON THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS. THE ARMED FORCES ARE SEEKING TO UNITE ON A MILITARY CANDIDATE WHOM THE PRINCIPAL PARTIES WILL NOT OPPOSE. THE ARMED FORCES HAVE FORMALLY AND/OR INFORMALLY SOUNDED OUT THE PARTIES ON THE POTENTIAL CANDIDACIES OF ARMY CHIEF GEN RAMALHO EANES, ARMED FORCES VICE CHIEF BRIG MELO EGIDIO AND PRIME MINISTER AZEVEDO.

2. ANTI-COSTA GOMES: THE SOCIALIST PARTY, THE POLITICAL PARTIES TO ITS RIGHT, AND THE "OPERATIONAL" MILITARY ALL OPPOSE ANOTHER TERM FOR COSTA GOMES DUE TO HIS EARLIER ASSOCIATION WITH VASCO GONCALVES AND THE COMMUNISTS. ALTHOUGH THE SOCIALISTS HAVE STOPPED KNOCKING COSTA GOMES OF LATE. THE IMPORTANT QUESTION HAS BECOME HOW LONG COSTA GOMES SHOULD BE LEFT IN PLACE BEFORE NEW ELECTIONS. THE PPD WANTS COSTA GOMES OUT OF THE PRESIDENCY AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE AFTER LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. THE PS AND CDS EARLIER APPEARED WILLING TO LEAVE COSTA GOMES IN PLACE FOR ANOTHER SIX MONTHS TO A YEAR UNTIL CONDITIONS IMPROVED FOR THEIR OWN PREFERRED CANDIDATES. FACED WITH PPD INTRANSIGENCE, AND THEIR OWN SECOND THOUGHTS, BOTH APPEAR READY TO ACCEPT A COMPROMISE ON TIMING WHICH WOULD GET COSTA GOMES OUT EARLIER.

3. RISE OF EANES: OVER THE PAST THREE WEEKS, ARMY CHIEF EANES HAS ECLIPSED PINHEIRO DE AZEVEDO AS THE LEADING CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT. EANES HAS SAID ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS THAT HE WOULD NOT BE A CANDIDATE, BUT STRENUOUS EFFORTS ARE UNDERWAY TO CONVINCE HIM TO RUN. ACCORDING TO PPD SOURCES RESISTENCE IS WEAKENING. WE HAVE HEARD INDIRECTLY FROM OTHER SOURCES THAT HE IS NOW AVAILABLE. EANES HAS A NUMBER OF ADVANTAGES OVER PRIME MINISTER AZEVEDO AS A CANDIDATE: HE IS FROM THE MOST IMPORTANT SERVICE -- THE ARMY; HIS HEALTH IS FAR BETTER THAN AZEVEDO'S; AND HIS CANDIDACY WOULD BE WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORTED BY "OPERATIONAL" MILITARY. EANES IS ALSO RESPECTED BY THE "POLITICAL" MILITARY. VASCO LOURENCO RECENTLY SENT UP A TRIAL BALLOON BY NOTING PUBLICLY THAT EANES WOULD HAVE WIDE SUPPORT IN THE ARMY. MOREOVER, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR MILITARY FIGURES TO HIS RIGHT, SUCH AS GALVAO DE MELO OR KAULZA DE ARRIAGA, TO OPPOSE EANES. EANES'S LACK OF POLITICAL EXPERIENCE AND HIS

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LACONIC PUBLIC IMAGE ARE AGAINST HIM, BUT HIS WELL-PUBLICIZED ADDRESS AT AMADORA FEB 7 AND HIS VISIT TO NATO HAVE BROUGHT HIM TO THE FOREFRONT OF PUBLIC ATTENTION.

4. PARTY POSITIONS: THE POLITICAL PARTIES WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO OPPOSE THE CHOICE OF A UNITED ARMED FORCES.

(A) THE SOCIALISTS WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY ACCEPT AZEVEDO OR EANES. BUT THE SOCIALISTS ARE RELUCTANT TO AGREE WITH THE PPD ON A COMMON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, WHEN THE PS ELECTION STRATEGY IS PREDICATED ON POINTING OUT ITS DISTINCTION FROM THE PPD. THE SOCIALISTS MAY ALSO WISH TO DELAY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS UNTIL TIMING IS RIGHT FOR A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT -- SOARES, OR UNTIL A MILITARY CANDIDATE MORE FAVORABLE TO THE PS EMERGES.

(B) THE PPD SUPPORTS EANES, AND BELIEVES HIS VIEWS ARE VERY CLOSE TO THEIR OWN. PPD WOULD ALSO ACCEPT AZEVEDO, BUT WITH SOMEWHAT LESS ENTHUSIASM.

(C) THE PCP WOULD HAVE SERIOUS RESERVATIONS ABOUT AN AZEVEDO OR EANES CANDIDACY, BUT WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO RUN ITS OWN CANDIDATE AGAINST THE ARMED FORCES' CHOICE. THE PCP HAS FEWER PLAUSIBLE REASONS TO OPPOSE EANES THAN AZEVEDO, WHO HAD OPEN CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS AS PRIME MINISTER.

(D) THE CDS MIGHT SUPPORT GEN GALVAO DE MELO FOR THE PRESIDENCY IF THE ARMED FORCES' CANDIDATE WERE TOO FAR LEFT FOR ITS PREFERENCES. AN AZEVEDO CANDIDACY WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO ENCOURAGE THE CDS TO BACK GALVAO DE MELO THAN WOULD AN EANES CANDIDACY. IF EANES WERE TO RUN, ODDS ARE THE CDS WOULD BACK HIM.

5. COMMENT: WITH THE DATE FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS NOW APPARENTLY SET FOR LATE JUNE, THE "NON-CAMPAIGN" FOR PRESIDENCY CAN BE EXPECTED TO MOVE INTO HIGH GEAR. THE OPERATIONAL MILITARY ARE SEEKING AN EARLY CONSENSUS AT LEAST PARTLY TO AVOID AN IMPASSE WITH COSTA GOMES POSSIBLY EMERGING AS A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE. SUCH AN EVENTUALITY ALSO
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WORRIES THE DEMOCRATIC PARTIES. WHILE EANES PERSONAL VIEWS ARE NOT WELL KNOWN, HIS STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS HAVE ALL BEEN HIGHLY POSITIVE FROM A US POLICY POINT OF VIEW. EQUALLY IMPORTANT, HE APPEARS TO HAVE THE FORCEFULNESS AND BASIC INTELLIGENCE TO PROVIDE THE STRONG LEADERSHIP THE COUNTRY NEEDS. WHILE WE HERE ARE RELATIVELY COMFORTABLE WITH AZEVEDO HE DOES HAVE HIS WEAKNESSES AND HIS STRANGE MOMENTS. I WOULD TENTATIVELY RATE EANES AS THE BEST OF THE PRESENT POTENTIALS FROM THE USG POINT OF VIEW. BUT FOUR MONTHS IS AN ETERNITY IN PORTUGUESE POLITICS AND THERE COULD BE A NUMBER OF SURPRISES WHICH COULD LEAD US TO A VERY DIFFERENT SET OF CONCLUSIONS BEFORE JUNE 27.
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